

Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project

Board of Governors Meeting

June 6, 2002

Public Advisory Committee and County Task Force Annual Report

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Public Advisory Committee (PAC) is charged with communicating community interests to the agency and science partners of the Wetlands Recovery Project and promoting the idea of wetlands recovery to key audiences. Key activities of PAC over the past year are described below.

Communicating Community Interests in WRP

- **Regional Strategy.** The PAC, working through the County Task Forces, contributed to the development of the WRP Regional Strategy which sets out the long-term goals and strategies of the Wetlands Recovery Project.
- **2002 Work Plan.** The PAC, working with the County Task Forces, helped to coordinate meetings in which project proponents met with Managers Group and Task Force representatives to explore project proposals. Task Force representatives later met with the Managers Group to evaluate proposals and develop the draft 2002-2003 Work Plan.
- **Small Grant Program.** The PAC, working with County Task Forces and the State Coastal Conservancy, has helped to develop the small grants program which is designed to engage new stakeholders and build organizational capacity to undertake restoration work.
- **Science Panel's Decision Support Tool.** The PAC is helping to coordinate community involvement in the development of the SWAMP model by identifying and gathering GIS data, articulating the needs of locally based organizations, and explaining the model to others.
- **Proposition 13 Grant.** Environment Now, acting on behalf of the PAC and Task Forces, has executed an agreement with the State Water Resources Control Board to develop a regional wetlands and watershed management plan. This \$607,500 grant allows for the hiring of (1) a half-time person to administer the grant (this person was hired 6 months early due to a grant by Environment Now); (2) full-time watershed coordinators for each of the 5 county task forces to conduct an assessment of watershed planning, to recruit organizations and to find funding to fill planning gaps, and to develop a comprehensive inventory of restoration projects throughout the region; and (3) four CalPIRG WaterWatch coordinators at the

California State University campuses to organize clean-ups, volunteer monitoring, and classroom presentations related to watershed protection. The hiring is complete and the work is now underway on this 15-month effort. In addition to completing all of the tasks in an exemplary way, a big challenge will be to secure funding for the watershed coordinators over the longer run.

Promoting Wetlands Recovery

- **Symposium.** The PAC helps to organize the Wetland Recovery Project's annual Symposium and awards ceremony and has commenced planning for the 2002 Symposium in Ventura County with the State Coastal Conservancy and the Science Panel.
- **Proposition 40.** This year PAC members were actively involved in the campaign to pass Proposition 40: The PAC chair served as the Southern California fund-raising co-chair; PAC member CalCoast organized a major effort to elicit resolutions from local government throughout the state; and many PAC members contributed funds, endorsements and resolutions, and get-out-the vote efforts.
- **Sacramento.** The PAC and CalCoast jointly sponsored the third annual event in Sacramento which focused on the educational value of the region's rivers, streams, marshes, beaches and nearshore waters. Over the next year, the PAC intends to work with the County Task Forces to ensure that legislators and their staff are invited for on-site visits in their districts.
- **Education and Outreach.** The PAC seeks to promote a wider sharing of watershed education activities throughout the region. The County Task Forces are taking the lead in facilitating communication and information sharing between watershed education programs and resources in their county. In particular, the Los Angeles County Task Force is working with TreePeople and the California Regional Environmental Education Community (CREEC) Coordinator to write a grant proposal that would enable Task Force members to contribute information to the CREEC web-based network and to link this network to the WRP Information Station. TreePeople will also help develop a watershed education message for the CalPIRG classroom program under the Proposition 13 grant work. An effort is underway in Ventura County to develop a region-wide education newsletter and to explore the creation of a Summit to Sea educational program along the Ventura River.

Similarly, the PAC envisioned forming a subcommittee to address how the WRP might increase its outreach to a more diverse ethnic, economic, and urban population. However, each of the task forces has committed to this effort. Of note is the Creek Watchers Latino Outreach program of the Community Environmental Council, and the efforts of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council to develop projects in South Gate and along Compton Creek.

Under the Proposition 13 grant, the PAC will be conducting research and convening a panel of local government representatives to discuss watershed protection ordinances. A USC graduate student has commenced the initial research into model ordinances.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges for the PAC is to gather up interests that seem to be devolving around efforts to create new watershed-based conservancies. The San Diego River, the Santa Ana River, and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Project are all exploring how they can form a conservancy analogous to the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. How to bring these efforts together when they are gearing up to compete against one another for funding? One strategy the PAC is likely to explore, especially given the state budget situation, is the feasibility of a regional watershed funding initiative, that can bring all of the watershed efforts together in a collective enterprise.

COUNTY TASK FORCES

The County Task Forces were established by the Public Advisory Committee as a means to coordinate and aggregate wetlands interests throughout coastal Southern California. The underlying belief is that by sharing information and identifying areas where watershed interests can work together regionally and sub-regionally, they can use resources more efficiently and effectively. A key to the Task Force's success thus far has been the tireless effort volunteered by NGOs, especially the Task Force co-chairs, and the leadership by a County Supervisor and their staff in each of the five counties. The Task Forces are bringing together representatives of the different watershed efforts in each county to share information and are also building organizational capacity to develop data and plans as well as to identify and carry out restoration work. Increasingly, the Task Forces are also influencing local government agencies to devote more attention to the protection of the region's wetlands.

Highlights and key objectives from each of the Task Force's efforts are briefly described below.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY TASK FORCE

Co-Chairs:

Supervisor Pam Slater, County of San Diego
Doug Gibson, San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy

Highlights

- The San Diego Task Force identified three priority watershed areas in need of planning efforts—the Tijuana River, San Diego River, Otay River and San Dieguito--and encouraged organizations to apply for the second round of Proposition 13 grants in these areas. The Task Force also encouraged submittal of proposals for Escondido Creek,

Dawson Reserve, and Rose Creek to the Department of Water Resources Urban Streams Restoration Grant Program.

- The Task Force is leading an effort to coordinate the educational components at the 5 North County coastal lagoons. The plan is that small nature centers at each lagoon will serve as an educational satellite, specializing in a different component such as biological or cultural resources. The Task Force is working with the County to develop a proposal for a major wetland education center, probably located at San Dieguito Lagoon, to serve as the hub of the coastal lagoon education program.
- The San Diego County Task Force's biggest accomplishment to date has been work on a GIS database matrix. The matrix, a conceptual model for identifying restoration priorities, helped Ventura secure a CIAP grant and helped Santa Barbara garner an invitation to submit a full proposal to the EPA. This shows that members of the task forces are not just dedicated to their individual projects, watersheds, or even counties. This matrix will also play a big role in filling in the data gaps of the SWAMP model and the Information Station.

Goals

- Secure funding to complete the GIS Matrix for the San Diego area through the 2nd round of prop13 grants.
- Prepare a comparative assessment between the Water Board and Coastal Conservancy grant processes to promote greater consistency and ease of grant administration for NGOs.
- Develop a calendar of upcoming grants including when the RFP is released, due dates, grantor's information, type of projects funded. This will be used to help Task Force members become more assertive grant entrepreneurs. A related goal is to form an outreach program to task force members by having grant workdays and to set aside time at each meeting to help members address requirements in their grant applications.

ORANGE COUNTY TASK FORCE

ORGANIZATION

Co-Chairs

Supervisor Tom Wilson, County of Orange

Jean Watt, Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks

Highlights

- The County has promoted watershed planning efforts related to each watershed in the county, many in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

- The Task Force also helped host the very successful 2001 Wetlands Recovery Project Annual Symposium and pre-Symposium activities.

Goals

- Assist in the mapping and promotion of coastal wetlands and watershed acquisition and restoration opportunities.
- Identify and nurture stakeholders to take on the responsibilities for needed projects.
- Work with the county's new watershed coordinator to hone a watershed message and program.
- Secure resources—time, person power, funding – to accomplish the Task Force goals.
- Encourage the emergence of willing sellers on key properties for wetlands preservation and restoration.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY TASK FORCE

ORGANIZATION

Co-Chairs

Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Los Angeles County

Dorothy Green and Rick Harter of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council

Highlights

- The Watershed Council has commenced detailed mapping of vegetation communities within the LA and San Gabriel River corridors.
- The Los Angeles County Task Force created an education subcommittee that has been meeting monthly to identify opportunities for expanding wetland and watershed education efforts in the County through the use of existing resources and programs.

Goals

- Coordinate with the Ventura County Task Force on effort along the upper Santa Clara River.
- Initiate the 5 sub-watershed management plans funded under Proposition 13, Round one: Ballona Creek, Dominguez, Compton Creek, Rio Hondo, Upper San Gabriel River, Coyote Creek (this latter in cooperation with Orange County).

- Enter field data from vegetation study of the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers into GIS format to create detailed data layer to help identify restoration work.

VENTURA COUNTY TASK FORCE

Co-Chairs

Supervisor John Flynn

Roma Armbrust, Ormond Beach Observers

Highlights

- An hour-long presentation about county watersheds to the Board of Supervisors with excerpts shown on KEYT, channel 3.
- Promotion of watershed issues to key county departments including the GIS department, which has received a CIAP grant to focus on watershed planning data; the planning department which has also received CIAP moneys to fund a watershed coordinator to assist the Task Force; and the Flood Control Districts that is expected to change its name to the Watershed Protection District. The District is under new leadership and has recently launched a restoration project in the Arroyo Las Posas, using methods that are modern and less damaging to the habitat.
- Representation by the Wetlands Recovery Task Force in the county-wide planning for an open space district, recently signed into law by the Governor.

Goals

- Achieve broader city participation in the Task Force with the aim of encouraging cities to actively take up the cause of restoration.
- Work with the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles County Task Forces in promoting restoration planning along the shared waterbodies.
- Develop a watershed education network in Ventura County with a possible focus on the Ventura River.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY TASK FORCE

Co-chairs

Supervisor Susan Rose, Santa Barbara County

Bob Thiel, Community Environmental Council

Highlights

- Sponsored workshops on watershed assessment and planning.
- Helped prepare the County goals and objectives for the WRP Regional Strategy.
- Promoted preparation of a hydrogeomorphic manual for southern Santa Barbara County streams.
- Facilitated the creation of several community-based watershed councils on priority creeks.

Goals

- Develop a master plan for southern Santa Barbara County watersheds.
- Improve steelhead habitat in priority creeks by modifying and removing passage barriers and enhancing habitat.
- Preserve and restore coastal wetlands and vernal pools along the southern Santa Barbara County.
- Integrate stormwater management with habitat restoration in urban creeks, and encouraging landowners and public agencies to take proactive measures to protect the impacts of continued urbanization.